Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced that a new guide, *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*, is available to help schools plan for any emergency, including natural disasters, violent incidents and terrorist acts.

"While the majority of our schools are safe havens for our children, the unfortunate reality is that without warning, a school or district could be faced with a crisis," Secretary Paige said. "Crises aren't planned. But having a plan can save lives, prevent serious injury and minimize property damage. This guide has been carefully developed by experts nationwide, and it will help better prepare our schools in the event of a crisis."

Paige reminded school officials that "the time to plan is now" and called on those schools that don't have a crisis plan to develop one. For schools that do have a plan in place, Paige said they should review, update and practice it because "documents on a shelf don't work in a crisis."

Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities will provide schools, districts and communities with the key concepts and components of good crisis planning.

Crisis plans should address state and local school safety laws and be customized to meet the unique needs of local communities. Based on research conducted by experts in school crisis planning, the guide lists four areas of crisis management that all school crisis plans should address: Mitigation-Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

The Mitigation-Prevention section addresses what schools and districts can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property. Preparedness focuses on the process of planning for the worst-case scenario. Response is devoted to the steps to take during a crisis. And Recovery deals with how to restore the learning and teaching environment after a crisis.

In addition, the guide lists key principles for effective crisis planning:

- Effective crisis planning begins with leadership at the top.
- Crisis plans should not be developed in a vacuum; they are a natural extension of ongoing school and community efforts to create safe learning environments.
- School and districts should open the channels of communication well before a crisis.
- Crisis plans should be developed in partnership with other community groups, including law enforcement, fire safety officials, emergency medical services, as well as health and mental health professionals.
- A common vocabulary among all schools and other key players is key.
- Schools should tailor district crisis plans to meet individual school needs and vulnerabilities.

- Schools should plan for the unique needs of children and staff.
- Administrators should include all types of schools where appropriate.
- Administrators should provide teachers and staff with ready access to the plan so they can understand its key components and act on them.
- Training and practice are essential for the successful implementation of crisis plans.

Because districts have different needs and face a variety of hazards, the guide also describes how several districts across the country have approached crisis planning. Some districts are likely to face tornados or severe weather, while others must address the hazards posed by being close to a nuclear power plant or railroad tracks. It is important for schools to plan for specific hazards they are likely to face.

To obtain a copy of the handbook, go to http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/ or download at http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf.